

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

At Istanbul Poetry Festivals, Ever-Flowing Innovations

Shantanu Sengupta · Wednesday, April 15th, 2015

When we talk of poetry festivals, the names that flash over our conscious mind are Struga Poetry Evenings, Macedonia, International Poetry Festival, Medellin, Colombia and Rotterdam International Poetry Festival among others. Each of these festivals has successfully created quite a sensation over decades by uniting internationally noted poets from around the world in one place. These fests have not only turned to pilgrimages of poets but have brought the poetic culture and tradition of their own country to the forefront. Medellin for example, was known as a drug capital before it got transformed into the poetry capital of the world through its annual poetry fest.

Istanbul is known for its cultural heritage, mix of traditions and literary sustainability. With ancient structures and places like the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, Hagia Sophia, Grand Bazar, Chora Church and current day advancements like the Galata Bridge, the city in itself is an ever-flowing poetry.

Since the turn of the last decade, Istanbul has come up with two prominent international festivals: The International Istanbul Poetry Festival (IIPF), which is considered as the largest independent literary event in Turkey, and the Istanbulensis International Poetry Festival, organized by the Sultanbeyli Municipality. These two events have been successful in bringing many international poets to Turkey, but the Uskudar International Poetry Festival, also known as *Uskudar Siir Festivali* in Turkish, with its very first annual event from 4th to 11th April 2015, seems to have surpassed every other literary festival in Turkey and has turned the literary focus of the whole world of poetry towards Istanbul through its wonderful and innovative chain of events.

One of the most innovative ideas of this festival was organizing poetry readings and poetry slams in several schools and universities of Istanbul. The often discussed fact that of late youth is insensitive to poetry was proved wrong by the awe-inspiring response of the students after each poetry reading and during the book signings in the fest especially by young Indian Poet Sonnet Mondal and Catalanian underground poet Roger Palaes.



International poets take stage on the inaugural day of the Uskudar International Poetry Festival in Istanbul

Some of the well known voices of poetry in the festival were:

Ladan Osman: Somalian by birth Ladan's poetry primarily focuses on racial politics, gender violence and her difficulties as an immigrant. A contributing poet at the Poetry Foundation in Chicago, Ladan spoke about the Somali struggles in the past years and the literature that instigates

poets in her country to pen upon sensitive issues. She expressed her concern over the limited opportunities of poets in Somalia and discussed the reasons behind most literary minded Somalians moving to other nations in search of better avenues to flourish.

Sonnet Mondal: A prominent voice of the young generation poets of India, Sonnet is more popular for poems that often speak beyond language and initial perception. This young poet with over five hundred literary publications to his credit was one of the attractions in the festival. During the festival Sonnet stressed on the fact that poetry itself is the inspiration for penning more poetry and poets shouldn't be bothered by the works of critics. The founder of The Enchanting Verses Literary Review, Sonnet further said successful poetry is not only the job of poets but it depends to a large extent on the effectiveness of readers who shall have curiosity free of presumptions while reading any poetry. Sonnet's poetry seemed to appeal more to the youngsters of Turkey as evident from their overwhelming response after each of his readings.

Roger Palaes: A singer who calls himself poet by chance is what Roger had to say about himself in a young writers' workshop in the festival. He was the most cheered poet of the festival, who read poetry with strange yet appealing expressions and used the style of punk while performing poetry. All he had to say in his final event was he does not believe in hope and likes to live in his present singing passionate and powerful poetry.

Ryszard Krynicki: One of the most prominent post-war poets of Poland, Krynicki's presence in the festival was seen distinctly. Krynicki is regarded as a leading member of the 'New Wave' group of poets along with Adam Zagajewski and Stanislaw Baranczak. Co-editor of the first independent magazine in communist Poland, Krynicki preferred speaking more through his poetry in the festival than deliver his personal opinions about poetry in general.

Other poets in focus in the festival were Leopoldo Castilla from Argentina, Sead Begovic from Bosnia, Muhammed Eno from Kenya and Balazs Szollosy from Hungary. Presence of other poets like Ahmed Saadawi from Iraq and Amal Kassir from Syria were seen as steps towards unified peace through poetry.

The festival coordinator Ismail Kilicarsian said that they have greater plans in future in lieu of attracting more international poets to the country. The active sponsorship, organization and support of the reigning Government of the Republic of Turkey, Uskudar Municipality and Turkish Cooperation & Coordination Agency indicated about how the nation wishes to move culturally in building relations with other countries like India, Argentina, Poland and Hungary among others. With the participation of poets from about 16 countries this poetry festival has added a mark in the world of culture unfurling yet another flag of tradition and poetry from Istanbul.

Top photo: Poets Sonnet Mondal and Roger Palaes sign their books.

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